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ABSTRACT

A planning and discussion committee was formed at the University of Arkansas (Little Rock) to evaluate the role that faculty teaching assessment might take in a planned liberal arts teaching excellence project. The committee leader attended an Assessment Strategies Workshop conducted by Trudy Banta at the University of Tennessee. The committee head then shared materials from the workshop with all committee members and other faculty and had a research assistant check the availability of all bibliographical material, about half of which was readily available. The committee met continuously for project planning over the weeks following the workshop in order to prepare the project proposal for liberal arts teaching excellence. Though the committee's proposal for further funding was denied, the discussion committee's work had many beneficial results including increased understanding by faculty participants of assessment and its role in higher education. The committee developed resource materials for assessment and identified library holdings, a draft for a faculty development project was produced and participants are positioned to plan future projects. Appended is a copy of the draft project proposal on faculty development. (JB)

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PROJECT SUMMARY: Teaching Excellence in the Liberal Arts

At the heart of this project was the attempt to build a sound assessment component for a faculty development project. We found that, essentially, a rich and varied array of assessment strategies can be used to evaluate teaching and learning in the humanities, even though faculty members may be initially dubious on the validity of such methods. Long-range planning is probably necessary to commit faculty to what is, after all, a risky proposition--a redirecting of their approaches to teaching.

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College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Science
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Little Rock, AR 72204

[The project originated in the College of Liberal Arts, which underwent reorganization and consolidation in the Summer of 1988.]

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	Year 1	$10,000
	total	$10,000

Teaching Excellence in the Liberal Arts
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview

This project grew out of my work in faculty development. Assessment was the missing link in the proposal for a large-scale teaching excellence project that I had earlier submitted to FIPSE. The funding would allow me time and resources to supply the assessment component.

Purpose

It was, it seemed, especially important to present the concepts of assessment to a faculty that was either unaware of the "assessment revolution" that was taking place, or was hostile to the concept of assessment. The major program that I intended to submit to FIPSE called for involving large numbers of liberal arts faculty in projects in teaching excellence. Faculty would have to feel comfortable with assessment before engaging in the projects.

Background and Origins

Having spent my teaching career at institutions that enroll large percentages of non-tradional students, I've long been dedicated to the methods of developing quality education for students who must function under less than ideal circumstances. I worked from a number of important assessments written in the mid-eighties (Involvement in Learning, Integrity in the Curriculum, and To Reclaim a Legacy) to identify the traits considered important for higher education.

Project Description

At the heart of my project was a committee that would discuss the role that assessment would take in the project that I was planning. My background in the field was enhanced by attending the Assessment Strategies Workshop conducted by Professor Trudy Banta (of the University of Tennessee) at Memphis, Tennessee, in October 1988. All the sessions I attended were most helpful, and the packet of assessment materials (including the bibliography) was especially so. I made the packets of material available to all committee members--and other faculty--and had a research assistant check the availability of all bibliographical

entries (about half the material was readily available to us). We also talked to a number of humanists over the country who were interested in participating in our faculty development project.

The committee met continuously for project planning over the weeks following the Assessment Workshop I attended. Even though the deadline for submission of preliminary proposals to FIPSE allowed no more time than that, I was still confident that we had assembled a viable teaching excellence project that was supported by a sound assessment component. In the return comments on the proposal, I learned that the assessment component was still not sufficient to justify the project. I have no quarrel with this judgment, but can only say that we had less than an ideal amount to time to shape the project for a 1987 submission.

Even though the preliminary proposal had not gained the support of the reviewing committees, I chose still to submit a final proposal. I was told that this was permissable under the rules, and I thought I could address the deficiencies of the assessment model outlined in the preliminary proposal, especially since I'd had several weeks to grow more familiar with the nuances of assessment. This proposal, too, was turned down by FIPSE. Although we have been turned down to this point, I will continue to refine and develop the assessment component for this project. I believe I have a viable concept for developing teaching excellence; apparently only the assessment component is wanting.

However, the project involved significant alternate activities. For one, it served to broach the issue of assessment with administration and faculty. Many faculty know about assessment, if they about it at all, from journalistic sources. They have not looked closely at the research material in journals, which shows assessment in a positive light.

Project Results

The project has had many benign results, even though we did not achieve the hoped for funding. Portions of our faculty has grown in its understanding of assessment and its role in higher education today. We have developed resource materials for assessment and have identified our library holdings. I have a draft of a faculty development project--including a strategy on assessment--that I can work to modify and refine. And, finally, I am in a position to plan future projects with a strong sense of the need to account for assessment.

Summary and Conclusions

I have learned that work in faculty development must necessarily begin in the assessment of teaching and learning, tasks that are especially difficult in humanities areas. Once faculty members understand what assessment is--or understand the rich diversity of strategies and methods included under the term assessment--they are rarely hostile to it.

FINAL REPORT: Teaching Excellence in the Liberal Arts

Project Overview

This project grew out of my work in faculty development. I have designed a number of projects that attempted to bring opportunties to faculty for developing and improving their teaching techniques, especially when dealing with non-traditional students. The purpose of this project was to consider ways to quantify improvements that we might achieve in teaching excellence. Given that I work in the liberal arts fields--areas that are considered difficult to assess quantitatively--this kind of research seemed particularly important. Assessment seemed to be the missing link in putting together a viable proposal for a large-scale teaching excellence project.

Assessment was the missing link in the proposal for a large-scale teaching excellence project that I had earlier submitted to FIPSE. The funding would allow me time and resources to supply the assessment component.

Purpose

It was, it seemed, especially important to present the concepts of assessment to a faculty that was either unaware of the "assessment revolution" that was taking place, or was hostile to the concept of assessment. (Many faculty see

assessment as having a political purpose, a way by which state legislatures could shake the semi-autonomy of the university system.) The major program that I intended to submit to FIPSE called for involving large numbers of liberal arts faculty in projects in teaching excellence. The key to determining whether teaching excellence could be quantified was to link the projects to assessment. Faculty would have to feel comfortable with assessment before engaging in the projects.

Background and Origins

Having spent my teaching career at institutions that enroll large percentages of non-tradional students, I've long been dedicated to the methods of developing quality education for students who must function under less than ideal circumstances. That is, how do we deliver quality education to students who have substantial responsibilites to family and job? In many cases, faculty--trained in prestigious graduate institutions--often do not feel comfortable teaching students having problems mastering even the basic skills.

I worked from a number of important assessments coming out of the mid-eighties (Involvement in Learning, Integrity in the Curriculum, and To Reclaim a Legacy) to identify the traits considered important for higher education. The traits included encouraging students to become autonomous

learners, to program learning through inquiry, to develop analytical and problem-solving skills, and to engage in the reading of original texts. We identified these as learning goals that professors might work to encorporate in their courses. FIPSE was originally interested in this project, but saw a need for the assessment component. That is, how does one measure a growth in problem-solving skills? or measure growth in becoming autonomous learners?

Project Description

At the heart of my project was a committee that would discuss the role that assessment would take in the project. For that I purpose, I believe the members of the committee were well chosen. Dr. Roby Robertson, of the Political Science Department, had done work in assesssment in connection with public administration programs. Dr. Mark Krain, a sociologist, was familiar with the research literature on assessing social programs. Dr. Belinda Blevins, from the Department of Psychology, has her own unique background in assessment from her work in cognitive psychology. Dr. Thomas Kaiser, of the History Department, could bring to the committee the perceptions of the humanist, who often have not dealt with quantitative assessment. Dr. Kaiser and I were in much the same position, because I had done little work in quantitative assessment.

My background in the field was enhanced by attending the Assessment Strategies Workshop conducted by Professor Trudy Banta (of the University of Tennessee) at Memphis, Tennessee, in October 1988. All the sessions I attended were most helpful, and the packet of assessment materials (including the bibliography) was especially so. I made the packets of material available to all committee members--and other faculty--and had a research assistant check the availability of all bibliographical entries (about half the material was readily available to us).

One of the key tasks was to encorporate a strong assessment component in the project that we intended to submit to FIPSE. The committee met continuously for this purpose over the weeks following the Assessment Workshop I attended. Even though the deadline for submission of preliminary proposals to FIPSE allowed no more time than that, I was still confident that we had assembled a viable teaching excellence project that was supported by a sound assessment component. In the return comments on the proposal, I learned that the assessment component was still not sufficient to justify the project. I have no quarrel with this judgment, but can only say that we had less than an ideal amount to time to shape the project.

Even though the preliminary proposal had not gained the support of the reviewing committees, I chose still to submit a final proposal. I was told that this was permissable

under the rules, and I thought I could address the deficiencies of the assessment model outlined in the preliminary proposal, especially since I'd had several weeks to grow more familiar with the nuances of assessment. Meanwhile, I had the opportunity to confer with humanists and scientists across the country who had engaged in teaching excellence projects. I thought that their ideas and their potential participation made the proposal especially strong. This proposal, though, was turned down by FIPSE. Although we have been turned down to this point, I will continue to refine and develop the assessment component for this project. I believe I have a viable concept for developing teaching excellence; apparently only the assessment component is wanting.

However, the project involved significant alternate acitivities. For one, it served to broach the issue of assessment with administration and faculty. Many faculty know about assessment, if they about it at all, from journalistic sources. They have not looked closely at the research material in journals, which shows assessment in a positive light.

I should mention, too, the work of Dr. Roger Webb (Department of Psychology) in our project. As the assessment consultant, he advised us on ways of validly measuring student learning. As an example of his work, I have included his report concerning the activities of the

Assembly Committee on Evaluation. Although our project did not fund Dr. Webb for this work, our projects did run simultaneously.

Further, the project has prompted us to pay more attention to the assessment issue and to provide resources for assessment practices. For long, the whole issue seems to have been limited to education departments, or other interests that involve pedagogy. We now know that the issue is large and urgent.

Project Results

As stated above, I believe the project has had many benign results, even though we did not achieve the hoped for funding. Portions of our faculty has grown in its understanding of assessment and its role in higher education today. We have developed resource materials for assessment and have identified our library holdings. I have a draft of a faculty development project--including a strategy on assessment--that I can work to modify and refine. And, finally, I am in a position to plan future projects with a strong sense of the need to account for assessment.

The original proposal did not include a formal and extensive strategy for evaluating the project. I assumed that evaluation would lie acceptance or non-acceptance of the large proposal. Since the project was not accepted in

its current form, I assumed less than satisfactory results for that aspect of the project.

In follow up discussions with faculty--informally conducted--I have found that the responses have been very positive. The members of the committee were happy to have the opportunity to review assessment procedures, and felt that they had given the project their best effort. The graduate assistant, James Dinkins, was especially happy for the opportunity to do research on assessment. In fact, his research carried him into suject matter that he incorporated into his masters thesis.

The project will continue under the form of submitted project proposals. Although as grant director, I was unable to resubmit in October 1988--I was on Off-Campus Duty Assignment--I will submit a faculty development project in 1989.

Summary and Conclusions

I have learned that work in faculty development must necessarily begin in the assessment of teaching and learning, tasks that are especially difficult in humanities areas. Faculty often have a natural antipathy toward measuring anything that it believes cannot be measured. So, as much as anything, we must learn how to approach faculty. Once faculty members understand what assessment is--or understand the rich diversity of strategies and methods

included under the term assessment--they are rarely hostile to it.

Appendix

DRAFT REPORT
Assembly Committee on Evaluation

November 12, 1987
(revised January 12, 1988)

A. General problem

The charge to the Evaluation Committee from the President of the UALR Assembly was to develop methods for evaluating the effectiveness of UALR's undergraduate curriculum. The primary need is to develop objective data on the performance of undergraduate students and graduates using the statement of educational goals developed by the BRC (Blue Ribbon Committee) as guidelines. That is, we need to be able to demonstrate 1) how well recent UALR graduates perform on the tasks described by the BRC, and 2) to what extent the curriculum reforms called for by the BRC improve existing performance levels? We need to be clear on one point here: our goal is to measure institutional effectiveness and not individual student achievement.

There is probably some urgency to make substantive progress in this area. Such an evaluation will be an important tool for institutional improvement. In addition, educational agencies, legislators and the public generally seem to be in a mood to demand some evidence of effect for the dollars spent on higher education. Unfortunately, ill-conceived evaluation programs are more often destructive than constructive. UALR needs to have a defendable evaluation program in place before such a program is mandated by an outside agency.

These are questions of considerable complexity. If we want to talk about levels of performance of UALR students on the educational goals developed by the BRC, and then, hopefully, be able to talk about improvement in those levels of performance, we must meet two conditions: We must have measuring instruments and techniques that accurately reflect the goals, and we must have samples of students that are representative of the group of students we want to describe.

It is difficult for school systems and institutions to come to grips with how seriously measuring instruments and sampling techniques effect the conclusions that can be drawn from research on educational outcomes. School systems, for example, routinely report high average SAT scores with pride, as an index of successful education. This is misleading statistic for two reasons. The SAT test is an individual aptitude test reflecting the inborn talent and cultural background of the student much more than any contribution of the school system, and the students taking the test are self-selected volunteers. The College Board and most sophisticated test users know that high average SAT scores is primarily indicative of a low percentage of students taking the test.

It is the intention of this committee to plan our evaluation efforts in such a way that will allow UALR to make valid statements about the achievement levels of UALR students and graduates. We do not intend to

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waste our time and the University's money collecting data for political or cosmetic purposes. If we go into systematic evaluation, we need to do so with the same degree of rigor that we would approach research we do for publication in scholarly journals.

As suggested above, there are two major problems facing an evaluation effort of the sort we contemplate here: measurement instruments and sampling technique. We propose to attack both in parallel fashion.

B. Measuring instruments:

The selection of instruments is critical. The committee believes that there must be some use of nationally standardized tests. We need to be able to compare our students to national norms, and we will not be credible without some data based on independent yardsticks. At the same time, we must avoid the temptation to buy "the test" and base all future calculations on that decision. It is unlikely that we will find a canned testing package that completely reflects the BRC goals (that are unique to UALR), and tests can become the "tail that wags the dog". It is shocking, for example, to realize the extent to which the contents of standardized achievement tests determines the curriculum of our public schools.

There appear to be three packages of test materials available on a national basis that touch to some extent the content areas that we need to assess. These are the CLEP program from ETS, the COMP program from the ACT, and new program called the Academic Profile, also from ETS. Each has its strengths and problems.

1. The CLEP tests are designed to allow individual students to demonstrate knowledge equivalent to general education requirements and to particular courses. One or more of the area exams might be useful as rising junior exams, but they are not very close to the BRC objectives. Experience with the CLEP tests suggests that they tend to be intelligence tests, rather than an achievement tests, and that scores are predicted best by SAT scores and not the quality of the education program. CLEP tests require a minimum of 90 minutes and are the most expensive of the standardized tests. Standard-setting exams for the CLEP tests are probably available at little or no direct cost.

2. The COMP program (College Outcomes Measures Program) from the ACT attempts to test areas that are close to those described by the BRC. These are communicating, solving problems, clarifying values, functioning within social institutions, using science and technology and using the arts. The logistics of giving and scoring the tests appears difficult, though more study on that area is required. Costs are moderate. The major difficulty appears the need for five person faculty scoring teams that will spend a total of about 60 minutes on each written and oral response. A two hour objective version is available that requires no faculty time, but is of questionable validity.

3. The Academic Profile program from ETS is new and relatively untested. It is designed to measure college level reading, writing, critical thinking and math skills in the areas of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The Academic Profile would cover many,

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though not all, of the BRC objectives. One hour test forms allow administration in a class period. The program is designed to assess institutions and programs, rather than individuals. A relatively complex sampling system is required to test groups of students on three tests that can be added together to obtain a measure of the program. Statements about individual students are not available unless the three hour long form is used. Costs are reasonable during this year (considered a pilot year), but will be higher in the future.

<u>It is the recommendation of the Committee that we explore all three of these testing programs and possibly do some pilot testing with all three to assess their usefulness for UALR.</u>

As we examine the standardized tests that are available, it will be important to keep in mind aspects of the BRC goals that are missed by each test. We will then have to cast about for other measuring devices that might be available. For example, there are published tests on critical thinking that need to be explored. Experts in the English Department need to be consulted in the area of writing assessment, which is a specialized field. If we want to be comprehensive, we will certainly need to develop some of our own measuring devices.

In addition to objective, standardized tests, we need to develop less formal, more open-ended methods for assessing student progress. For example, there is a possibility of keeping a writing folder on individual students covering everything from freshman composition to their last senior courses. Such records would allow us an opportunity to put some meat on the bare bones of test scores and would be more psychologically satisfying to those among us who are mistrustful of numbers. Development of these measures will tax our creativity.

C. Sampling problems:

The discussion of tests and measurement begs the more critical question of "test who?". Simply collecting test data on students does not allow us to say anything about UALR's programs. We need to sample in some systematic fashion so the universe of students to which our inferences apply can be clearly delineated. The importance of the sampling problem cannot be overstated. It would appear that most educational outcomes research suffers in this area. It is possible, for example, for a school to significantly increase (or decrease) scores on standardized tests by redistricting, increasing admissions standards, recruiting from different groups, etc. without doing anything different in its curriculum.

Except for some possible pilot testing to check instruments, the Committee does not want to start systematically testing students until we have the sampling problem in hand.

There are two major evaluation goals:

1. Are the students we are presently graduating adequately prepared, using the guidelines of the BRC as a standard?

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2. As we implement the changes recommended by the BRC, does the performance of our students improve?

At some point, we need to address the question of the degree to which UALR can take credit for the product--the Value Added question--but that is a much trickier problem.

In order to assess our two major questions, we need to be able to make statements about all UALR graduates. Since we have little or no access to or control over people once they graduate, we assume that this means our first target for assessment is UALR seniors. If we can get some reasonably objective measures on this group over a period of several years, then change over time with comparable students would be relevant to an estimate of the effects of curriculum change. At some future time, we might want to gather data on students at earlier stages of progress (e.g. as students complete the core curriculum) in order to assess the progress of a group of students within their UALR experience. The problem we have addressed in many of our discussions is how to collect the data we need under appropriately controlled conditions. For example, even if we randomly sampled classes in such as way as to guarantee that the classes adequately reflected the UALR student body, we would have the problem of class cutters.

Our preliminary conclusion is that we should test all graduating UALR seniors (though not necessarily with all tests) and that we should make participation in the data gathering process a requirement for graduation. At present rates, this would give us a sample of less than 1000 students per year. So far, this is the only method we can think of that will insure representation of all graduates. Making participation in the evaluation process a requirement, would also be a visible means of asserting the importance the University places on this process.

If we have these students to test, it will be important to remember, and to make clear to students, that we are assessing the undergraduate program, not the student.

At this point, we have not yet tried to think about the problems of designing a study that would allow us to track progress over time at UALR. It is generally conceded among experts in the experimental design field that pretest--posttest designs cause more problems than they solve. For the time being, we are going to concentrate on the problem of objectively describing the quality of our graduates and worry about where their abilities are coming from later.

D. A long range testing program

The magnitude of the program that would result from testing large groups of students over a number of years in several area would be considerable. The committee assumes that some sort of evaluation or assessment center will have to be established with permanent funding. We suggest that a center with faculty leadership and a permanent paraprofessional staff is probably the right model. This committee or some logical successor needs to remain in place to insure faculty oversight of the evaluation process.

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We need to start a search for external funding right away. It is possible that the local Rockefeller Foundation or the Arkansas Business Council might be a source of start up money. Several national foundations and agencies have given money for this sort of venture, but we need to come up with the factors that make our efforts special or unique.

E. Cost estimates:

There may be some national guidelines suggesting budget percentages or per student cost that an institution of UALR's size and scope should allocate for assessment and evaluation. Even if the Committee is successful in securing start up funding for our efforts, the University will have to deal with the continuing costs in future years. Allocating as little as $10/per student would give us an annual budget of around $100,000, and that is probably not an unreasonable target figure for the near future. As budgets estimates are prepared, University officials should keep this cost factor in mind.

In the short run, we need funding to cover the cost of testing material for the pilot studies and to cover staff support. If, for example, we pilot test with the ETS Academic Profile program and test about 200 students with each of three forms of the tests, the cost for test materials and scoring (at $6.50/test) will be $3,900. Pilot testing with the COMP program would have approximately the same direct cost, but we would have to compensate faculty members for the considerable amount of time required for scoring. It does not appear unreasonable to try to find funding for one staff person (estimated annual cost $25,000) starting the in Spring semester. The University should be able to provide some office space, furniture and computer time without budgeting any additional funds.

<u>It would appear, therefore, that we should try to find about $40,000 for a one year start-up study and at least an equal amount for two subsequent years. Officials will need to look at existing sources of funds to see what might be available. Some contribution from University funds would seem to be critical to our efforts to raise funds from outside sources.</u>

Members of the committee:

Charles Anderson	T. Harri Baker	Doug Buffalo
Robert Bradley	Juliana Flinn	Al Karlin
Floyd Martin	Eric Melvin	Fanye Porter
Jennifer Rector	Roger Webb (chair)	

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